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PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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Brooklyn, January, 1869.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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# THE TRIUMPH OF GOODNESS.

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"And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest."—Rev. xv. 3, 4.

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If it were possible in one way more than in another to destroy the glory of this most wonderful Book, it would be by treating it after the manner of science, or after the manner of philosophy. If it be treated as if it were an unfolding either of the past or of the future by a succession of ideas philosophically expressed, or according to any rules which belong to didactic teaching or statement, it will be utterly destroyed and ruined. For the Book is unique in this: that it is a drama which contains in it the moral of dramas. It is a Work addressed to the imagination in respect to the highest aspirations and experiences, and in respect to the whole sphere of human desire and knowledge. It teaches chiefly by symbols, which were far more significant in ancient days than they are now; and things were made to do service then that to-day seem strange simply because other things are substituted, and they are unwonted. Its sphere is cast in a much higher atmosphere than we are accustomed to think. It is a Book which overhangs the whole career of time. Indeed, it is at the point where time and eternity meet that this sublime drama takes its rise. It

is poetry; and yet not lyric, and certainly not cast in the mould of pleasure. It is not poetry for any such measured use as we make of poetry in literature. At times it seems wild, and even grotesque, but never less than sublime. It is unworldly, and it has strange spiritual power ; because whatever undertakes to successfully teach a drama or a grand oratorio must needs be lifted up largely above the thoughts and comprehension of men.

Now, if this, which in its single self has been the fountain and inspiration of the grandest works of men—of such works as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as Klopstock's great German work corresponding to it, and as the work of Pollock, which was much read, but which seems now to have largely died out of the general mind—if such a work be treated, as I might say, after the manner of men, it is disfigured and utterly ruined.

What should we think of one who should go into the lobby of the Vatican to see the frescoes of Raphael, and take with him scales and rules, weighing out certain parts of the pigment, measuring other parts, and ciphering upon and estimating these pictures by weight and size, as if they were a mere merchantable commodity ? Men would stand with uplifted hands in amazement that there should be found fools that would treat pictures in this way, applying to them rules that they are infinitely above, and that have no relation to them. What if we should find men who in regard to music or poetry should treat it after the same commercial scale—after the same mathematical rule ? And yet, so men have been for generations attempting to interpret this sublime, vague, but most glorious and useful drama, ciphering throughout the past as if it were a literal prophecy, and ciphering into the future as though it were a prophecy unfulfilled ; and attempting, by arithmetic, by historical interpretations, by various ingenious parallelisms or inferences or analogies, to obtain didactic meanings from it to suit their own schemes of thought.

Suppose a youth should walk, at evening, when the heavens were all balm, and the sun, just gone down, was throwing up all gorgeous colors into the west, mounting to the very apex of the sky—suppose a youth, walking at such a time

with his well-beloved, they being full of sentiment, full of feeling, in the midst of this charming scene, somewhat forecasting their own life, and in the language of affection looking down through the days that were to come—suppose that then she should breathe the thought of her fancy, her feeling and her love, into his ear, and he should receive it in silence, and think of it for a time, and at last say, “ My dear, let me reduce what you have been saying to the laws of the mind ; let me see exactly the philosophy of those statements.” How in an instant the touch would turn the whole scene to emptiness and folly ! How incongruous, how impertinent, it would be ! And yet, it would not be more so than are those methods by which men have attempted to solve, and to satisfy themselves about, this stupendous and unmanageable Book. You will sooner reduce the Northern Lights to the conditions of a material proposition than you will reduce this Book to any method of thought that is yet known. You will sooner make the sunset conform itself to any theory of arrangement. It is a drama, indicating the close of the long struggle between good and evil which has been and is a thread of human history. It is a drama which does not pretend to be symmetrical, and which does not attempt to have unity. It is like a great piece of music, filled with strange choruses and songs. It is full of swarming conflicts set off by stupendous images. In the construction of this irregular, sublime, transcendent drama, all creation is made a tribute. It includes lions, and lambs, and eagles, and dragons, and kings, and slaves. The good and the bad are mingled with thunderings and lightnings, with night and with day. Seas of fire, seas of glass, pavements of gold, cities, gardens, all manner of fantastic things and all manner of real things, are here strangely blended ; and who can unfold them, who can take them apart, and give them that analysis which belongs to time, to history, or to any of the modish thoughts of mankind ?

It is a sublime Book that hangs in the future, giving assurance of the final triumph of goodness, of truth, of justice, and of love in the world ; and we must take it as a magnificent tableau, and not as a regulated philosophical

statement, and still less as a history, either of the past or of the future. To interpret that Book is to feel it; and he interprets it alone, while he rejoices in it, who finds his imagination swelling to moral inspirations, who finds himself lifted up into an heroic mood, who believes that the things which now seem weak have in them everlasting strength, and that the things which seem now trodden under foot are as seeds that, being trodden under foot, are to spring up with new vitality and strange power. It is a Book which reaches the understanding but little, and the heart much—and that through the strong colors of imagination.

It is out of this Book that we have a multitude of scenes; but none of them, perhaps, is more remarkable than the one which I have selected for our text. For, although the description of that strange scene, which we read in the opening of our service to-night, sung by ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, has some elements which are lacking in this, yet there is in this passage, if less of the pictorial, more scope and more inward suggestion for motive.

"And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb."

Now, Moses is not to be regarded here exactly as a historic personage; certainly it is not the song which he composed that is meant, nor the song that was composed by the Lamb; but here is the theme—*Moses and the Lamb*. And what was Moses in this heavenly tableau, to the thoughts of those addressed, but the beginning of a great divine dispensation of mercy and of education? He, far back in the wilderness, and in the beginnings and sources of history, organized truth and beauty and right, and set agoing those great services by which the soul was to be enriched and ennobled. In other words, he was the beginner. The song, beginning with Moses, and ending with the Lamb, connected the very first dawn of divine truth, in the earliest periods, with its first flow, and all its mutations, clear down to the time of Jesus Christ, who in Jerusalem was, and who now in the New Jerusalem is, typified as the Lamb. The figure to us is almost dead, but to the Jew, who had been accustomed to

associate with the sacrificial Lamb whatever was sweet, whatever was beautiful, whatever was pure and unworldly in perfection, the figure meant immensely more than it means to us.

The song was of triumph. It was the shout, the jubilic outcry of the universe, that stood around about the ends of things, looking back to the beginning, and seeing the way of God down through the whole dispensation of time in the world, now fulfilled and brought to a triumphant close in the other life. All that there was in the different heroes; all that there was in the different dispensations; all the judgments; all the sufferings; all the reformations; all the growths; all the developments; all the victories—whatever had gone to make up the moral elements in human history, in the household, and in matters touching priestly offices and prophetic qualities in those who witnessed in the wilderness, in prisons, and in the mountains, the apostolic administrations, and all the after periods, and doubtless all that which has come down from the apostles' day to ours—all these things constitute the theme of that great heavenly out-breaking song.

And what is the result of it? It is simply the chanting of the old bard by which the deeds of his chief are narrated, as we narrate the achievements, enterprises, battles, and victories of a hero.

"Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest."

Here, then, is the divine catastrophe—evil gone under; imperfections swelled out to perfectness; ungrowth and crudeness brought up to ripeness and to beauty; goodness triumphant through the universal realm. All nations shall come to thee, not one being left out.

This was the vision, not of time, but of the upper sphere; and it was this: the absolute triumph of the divine part in man. They who have gone before, and for generations yet those that shall follow us, must see the flesh stronger than the spirit in the great mass of mankind. The saddest sight,

I think, that a man can contemplate, who believes in the Fatherhood of God and the maintenance of moral government, is the way in which the race have lived hitherto. Time, looked at from any high standpoint, is a most sad and dreary experience, unless we have some outlet ; unless we have some compensation somewhere. If there be no consolation ; if you believe in none ; if you take the human race ethnologically, and with the narrow eye of science simply,—the eye of sense,—I know not anything that is so sad, and that so tends to destroy the trust of man in man, or all hope for man. The might and power of past ages has been physical, passional, sensuous, devilish ; and although here and there there have been sprinklings of goodness, although here and there there have been a thousand sweet voices heard, yet, in the main, the chant of time has been hoarse, harsh, cacophonous. In the main, the movement of the human race has been the movement of vast bodies with vast sufferings, and vast wastefulness, and vast uselessness.

To-day I might take the continent of Africa and turn it bottom side up into the gulf of destiny, and take out every living thing in it, and the world would not know that it had lost a thing. To-day I might take more than half the globe, and sweep the hand of destruction across it, and cut off the race of men, and the world would lose no idea, no moral influence, no treasure that it was important to keep, no possibility in this life of anything great.

And if man be looked at as a creature of time, and as worth only that which he is able to contribute to political economy and to the welfare of the globe, he is the poorest thing on the earth.

It is bad to look too literally at things, and to trace them too literally. It is, therefore, that we find in this the rebound from minute and statistical and philosophical investigation. There must be something which shall help us out of this ; which shall lift a man's soul above the traditions of historical verity. We get it through the imagination in this light that streams down from the far future. And that struggle which has been going on, although there have been great improvements in some respects, is still going on. Nor

is it hard to be skeptical to-day. It is hard not to be. It is not hard for a man that opens his eyes to see. It is easy for a man to be orthodox, if he will take the right books, and shut himself up, and hear nothing except what they contain. It is easy for a man to have faith in Christian thought respecting this world in all the glories of the millennial conceptions, if in seeking facts he will take only those that are convenient, and those that are arranged for that special purpose. But when you take the human mind, and shut out nothing, and look at all the conditions of men, all their birth traits, all their tendencies, all the great channels in which they inevitably flow; at things as they are, as they usually have been, and as they will yet for generations be; when you look out with a true, loving eye, and an unbiased judgment, it is not easy not to be doubting, skeptical. There must be some door open. An honest man, a sympathetic man, a generous man, in other words, a child of the gospel, cries out in anguish of soul at the state of things which he finds upon the globe. There is need of some relief somewhere, or one could not live under the pressure and burden.

If a man can shut himself up in a system, so as that his sympathies are cut off from his kind; if a man can be so trained by any strange transformation of nature within that he shall feel himself bound to sympathize with the elect, and live or rest without concern or care for all else; if a man can coldly look on and be happy when he knows, or thinks he knows, that his friends are to be condemned, I can see how he may be relieved from pressure of doubt and skepticism and unbelief. But I cannot conceive how a man who undertakes, according to the spirit of the master, to say, "The field is the world, and God so loved the world that he gave his son to die for it"—I cannot conceive how a man who holds himself responsible in his reason for taking an account of the condition of the whole human family from the beginning through the bloody ages to the present day, with all their prospects in the future—I cannot understand how such a man shall not be troubled, even if he have nothing but the mere earth-side, or physical sense, to judge from.

It is from this aspect that there comes to me inconceivable

relief and rejoicing when I find that the spiritual, the ineffable, cannot be actually represented, cannot be stated systematically and succinctly, because the higher states of being have no corresponding expressions, no language, by which they can be philosophically set forth.

If an emotion be made known to us it must be made known by some symbol, by some vision, by some poetic representation ; and therefore, looking down through the ages and hearing the thunder of groans, and the clash of battles, and seeing rivers of blood still rolling along the gulf-stream of time, seeing the world bestormed, and seeing lurid tornadoes sweeping over the earth, it is an unspeakable gladness to see at the end, and on the horizon, the bright and glowing colors of triumph ; and I stop to gaze ; and that administration which has seemed so doubtful, so dark, seems lighter and plainer. They who stand disengaged from the ignorance and darkness of time ; they who are lifted up, and are at a point of vision where they can see the past, the present and the future—I behold them, not bearing witness to us, but in their own unconsciousness breaking out into ecstacies of gladness because God is justified. He who brought into existence this globe, with all its miserable populations, in the last estate shall stand and be glorified in the thought and feeling of those who behold the end as well as the beginning. Yea, he shall be glorified, not as the oriental monarch is, who is praised whatever he does, but upon grounds and reasons.

“Thou only art holy.” “All nations shall come and worship before thee.” Why? “For thy judgments are made manifest.” There is charity ; there is explanation ; there is reconciliation ; there is harmonization ; and in the end it shall appear, when we see from the beginning to the end of this tremendous, and as yet uninterpreted, riddle of life and time, with an unclouded eye, and with a vision just and true and perfect—then it shall appear that God is lovely and beautiful.

This vision of God that we shall then have will present him in such an aspect of loveliness and beauty that we shall no longer, as we do now, see through a glass, darkly ; we

shall no longer worship God as we do here, tentatively and strugglingly ; we shall stand in the presence of God as men stand in the light of the sun. When the sun pours itself down upon men they cannot look at it, from its fullness and glory of light. And the glory of God is a glory which the disengaged spirit shall appreciate. It is a glory that the love of every ransomed human soul shall appreciate. It is a glory which, made ineffable, shall be appreciated by all that is pure and true and noble in us. It is a glory that shall shine out so transcendently that every soul shall be awakened by it as flowers are by the sunlight. And those to whom here, looking upon the career of time, it seems most murky and muddy, shall in that blessed state see reason of congratulation and rejoicing.

Now, I do not ask to know how it shall be : I only ask that it shall be. I am satisfied that there is no other outcome to human life than that. I see from day to day what is the difference between men—between the worst and the best ; and I go back to Solomon, and must needs take his melancholy philosophy. After all the strivings which men go through, when you consider how imperfect life is, what is it worth ? It does not seem to be worth much here ; but oh ! it is the beyond that gives value to the present. It is not the measure we have here, but the fulfillment which we expect there, that makes life worth having. Who would bear the frets, the annoyances, the burdens, the long-continued sorrows, the accumulated insults, the raspings, the pressures of life ; who would carry on and on this troubled dream which is so easy to be ended (for life, like a candle, you can blow out with a puff) ; who would take all the sufferings of this life, if there was nothing but this ? It is true of many a man in the conflict of life, that the more suffering he has, the harder it is to bear, the more it has power over him, the more he shuts himself up in his feelings. But when I look beyond and see an unexplainable victory, let me know that it is certain and that there shall be a period when I shall stand among the ransomed throng, and see on every side radiant manifestations of harmonious wisdom in perfected form, and then in that faith and in that hope I am

willing to live, to bear and to suffer. For all I want is certainty. I can wait for the consummation.

When, in 1863, I was a pilgrim in Paris, my country lay upon my soul, and almost took joy from my eyes and my heart in the scenes that I beheld, and in the company that I met. The depth and blackness of her struggle lay heavily upon me. And it was on one radiant Sunday, not unlike this, that as I wended my way from the Grand Hotel to the church the tidings came of the surrender of Vicksburg. No words can tell the buoyancy, the awful sense of gladness, that I had. I went into the house of God, and I sat down in the pew of our minister, Mr. Dayton. By my side sat his daughter, about eighteen or twenty years of age. In a pause of the service (and I thought it was not unmeet to be mingled with the religious service), I said to her, "Vicksburg has surrendered." She answered me not a word; but, turning to her companion, another young lady, she whispered it to her; and both sat still as statues. The hymn was given out, the music sounded, and she began to sing; but no sooner had she opened her lips to sing than, in a flood of tears, she buried her head in her hands, and wept for gladness and triumph. She was far from her native land; the ocean was between her and her home; she was yet to abide in a foreign country for many months; but to receive that news was enough. It overwhelmed her. It overwhelmed me also. And before the sun went down, yea, before the sun was at the noon, the other tidings came of the defeat of Gettysburg; and then my cup ran over. No man can tell how victoriously I walked. At the Grand Hotel, where I staid, was a large collection of men to whom my name was not savory, and who had been accustomed to gather themselves in the great court when I came down, and by every mute demonstration to show contempt for me, and to send many contemptible messages by the servants to me (which I never received, although I heard of them afterwards); and no sooner (I was wicked!)-no sooner had I learned the double glory than I went back to the hotel and walked out into that court to see my adversaries; and alas! they were not there—not one of them.

It was when I was tossing upon the sea, off the harbor of Charleston, that we were spoken, in 1865, and the tidings were communicated to us from another ship, "Lee has surrendered;" and the wild outcry, the strange caprices and exultations of that moment, they never will forget who were present. We were far off from the scene of war; we saw no signs nor tokens; it was as if the heaven had imparted it to us; but oh, what gladness, what ecstasy there was in that news no man can know but those who have suffered as we had suffered. It was a whole life-time that we lived in those four years—yea, a hundred life-times. A man might live twenty centuries, and not in all of them have as much experience as was crowded into those dark four years. And yet, when the tidings of victory came, all the past was as nothing; and ever since the thunder of cannon, the clash of swords and the groans of the wounded have been dying out and receding further and further, till they have well nigh gone. Wounds that could not well be healed have become less and less sensitive, and our whole land is steadily coming together, and being knit together, in spite of hindrances, and in spite of the many things that would better not have been; and before ten years have rolled around the great flame of war which has passed over us will have been well nigh forgotten.

So, only let me know that after the conflicts of every kind in this life—all jarrings, all disputes, all superstitions, all cruelties, all idolatries, all unfaiths or unbeliefs, all crimes, all vices—only let me know that after these, I shall stand and look back upon time, and shout, "Thou art worthy, Lord God Almighty, because thy judgments are just and true, and all nations shall be gathered under thee," and I am content. The darkness shall be but as a troubled night. The day comes, and where is the night? where are its dreams?

Now, then, we have part and lot in that blessed song. They who have gone before us are singing now. My mother's voice has not been still for these years and years. My little children have not been songless. They whom I have taught in my long ministry, and who have gone home before me, have not sat waiting dumb and empty. Those whom you all have known, thrice ten thousand, ten thousand times ten

thousand, who have gone up, are to-day in the plenitude of that heavenly vision ; and we who are lingering and waiting may rise through the ministration of the imagination, through these gorgeous symbols, through this magnificent drama which foretokens the struggle and the victory, and may join in singing that great song of Moses and the Lamb—the song of redemption—the song of the healing of the nations—the song of the destruction of evil and the triumph of good ; and through long suffering, through many defeats, through the steady growing power of goodness and its final ascendancy, all darkness shall be swept from the universe, and there shall not be a pang, nor a sorrow, nor a wandering soul ; but God shall be glorified, and shall sit supreme, with his whole household around him, blessing and blessed forevermore.

May you so live that now, beforehand, the joy, the cordial, the blessed strength and stimulus of this anticipated victory, may comfort you on your way. May tears be staid, or may they flow for medicine. May sorrows be healed, or may they be sanctified. May your faith and patience be augmented. Look up, look beyond ; and whatever other things you may draw out of this Book, of pleasure and of joy, do not forget this : that there is a living picture hanging over the church and over time, proclaiming this grand and comforting truth,—“ Goodness shall triumph, evil and the Devil shall be exterminated, and God shall seem lovely to every living thing.”

## PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

BEHOLD us yet struggling in the darkness or in the twilight, our Father. Thou that sittest in the midst of joy and victory—hast thou forgotten? Thou that hast known tears, and sorrow, and death—hast thou forgotten? Blessed be thy name, O Lord our God, that there is nothing that thou dost forget except our sins. All our wickedness is ever present with thee. All our desires and all our failures bring thee to our succor. For thou art a present Help in time of trouble; and thou seest how the course of time doth sweep us. Helpless we are cast down upon the river of life, unable to resist, swept by it, whirled in eddies hither and thither, and often precipitated down narrow and dark ways: but we are never lost to thy sight; we are never lost to thy power and thy government. We are controlled by thee as much in the darkness as in the light. Thou art He that walkest upon the sea, and in the night, and upon the shore, and in the twilight. Thou art in the city, and thou art in the wilderness. Thou art in heaven, and thou art upon the earth. Wherever there is need, there is divine supply.

We rejoice in thy greatness. We cannot understand it. We are often perplexed in attempting to measure thee by the analogies of human life. We strive to conceive of thee by the patterning of our nature upon thine. All that we can do is to find some things that we discern as through a glass, darkly; and yet, they are things so full of glory, and so surcharged with all hope-inspiring elements, that we rejoice even to see thee through a glass as darkly. But the vision waits. There are those, innumerable, who behold thee face to face. There are those in thy presence who have gone forth from our families. We have also our forerunners from this brotherhood. From every one of our households have passed out those who have gone before. And they all are with thee, rejoicing. We are left behind to fulfill yet something of duty—some portion of the destiny that has been appointed unto us. Thou art serving these, often in ways that are to us unknown; and thou wilt yet call us home; and we shall rise into the land of victory, and of joy, and of honor evermore.

Now, be pleased to help us, that, though we may not leave our tasks, and lay aside our burdens here, to go up and rejoice there, we may rise in thought, and by faith take some refreshment.

Visit the lost. Find those that have gone forth. May they taste the joys that leave behind no sorrows, realize the blessedness of eternal victory, and come back to live again as if they had waked from pleasant dreams of the night that linger through the day, and cheer and comfort us.

Take away our sordidness. May we not have a feeling of servitude to thee. Fill us with that interpreting filial love which shall make thee transcendently beautiful, and which shall draw us along the ways of duty by that which is sweet and noble, and not by scourging fear.

We pray that thou wilt grant that we may more and more abound, in the Christian life, in all honor, in all truth, in all fidelity, in courage, in hopefulness, in activity, and in accomplishment there-

by. Grant that we may never be weary in well doing; for what matters it what befalls us? Why, heaven is just beyond, and we cannot fall without falling into the land of the blessed. Grant that through tears, and through sorrows, and through sighs, we may still rejoice in losses, in burdens, in troubles of every kind. May we learn how to rejoice. Teach us the divinest lesson which thy servant of old was taught, that we may rejoice in affliction, and make up in ourselves that which was lacking in the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that thou wilt help us better to fulfill our duties at home, and better to discharge all the obligations which rest upon us in our relations one with another in the business of life. May we be better neighbors, better citizens, better men; and may the spirit of God inspire us, lifting us above all littleness, meanness, and untruth, and purifying our inward vision from darkness, and our hearts from guile.

Grant that we may walk as they who know that they are the sons of God. We beseech of thee, grant us this inward blessing which shall itself produce all outward good, or sanctify whatever experience may come to us. We pray that thou wilt accept our thanks for the joy, the inspiration, the intercourse, and the hope of this day; and grant that the spirit of this day may stream forth throughout all the week; and may it be the door of the week through which heaven is poured upon our way. And so be pleased to grant us from week to week this vision, this day of rest and of heaven, that all our days in its spirit may be linked together; and that at last it may not be unfamiliar to us when we rise to the song, the sympathy, the occupation, and the joy of those who are redeemed.

And we will give the praise of our salvation to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. *Amen.*



#### PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

GRANT unto us, our Father, great joy in the faith which we derive through our imagination. These are the consummations which are needed to interpret time and life. These are the compensations which we desire, and without which we faint and sink. We will believe in them. Our heart and our flesh cry out for God in victory for righteousness. Be pleased, we pray thee, to make us content with the allotment of our lives. Light or shadow, burden or rest, trouble or peace, whatever may befall us—may we be content with it. Grant that we may feel that this is not our home. May we regard heaven as our home, and to that may we look, and in that by forethought may we dwell; and at last may we go thither, and see thee as thou art, and be like thee. And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son, and Spirit. *Amen.*

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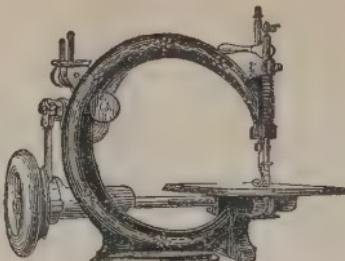
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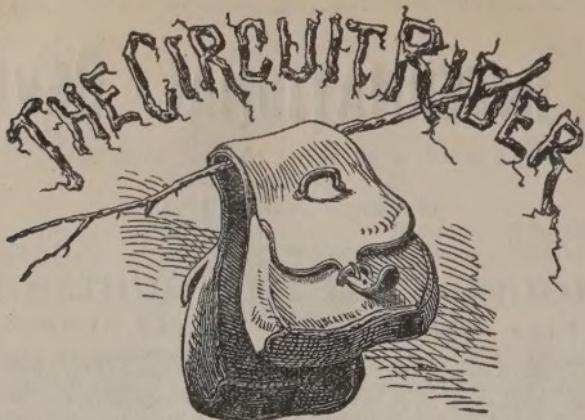
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